

Northbrook, IL – In the wake of last week’s recall of nearly one million Big Bird and Elmo toys imported from China, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) introduced legislation that will increase penalties for unsafe food and toys and provide millions for additional safety inspections.

“Congress must do all it can to protect American families from dangerous toys and food produced in China,” said Congressman Kirk who met with reporters today to discuss the depth of the import problem. “When you look at the number of toys on this table made in China, it becomes very clear that safety measures must be increased. My legislation will send a very clear message to anyone who imports tainted goods that threaten the safety of our kids: violators will pay dearly and more inspectors are on the way. The safety and well-being of our children comes first – poisonous toys are unacceptable.”

Before the August recess, Kirk introduced H.R. 3100, the bipartisan Import Safety Act of 2007, to increase penalties levied against importers of contaminated goods by 100-fold. Food and toy violations resulting in death would trigger fines increased from \$500,000 to \$50 million. The legislation also provides an additional \$20 million to the Consumer Product Safety Commission for overseas inspections and another \$20 million to the Federal Drug Administration for overseas inspections of processed food and toothpaste.

Kirk, the co-chair of the bipartisan U.S. – China Working Group in the House, also introduced the U.S. China Diplomatic Expansion Act of 2007. This legislation, among other things, will authorize the establishment of 10 new American Presence Posts in China that could house inspection officials and also boosts funding to Rule of Law Initiatives that could work with manufacturers on these problems.

On Tuesday, Fisher-Price issued a recall of nearly one million Big Birds, Elmos and Dora the Explorers because they were made with lead-based paint. Lead poisoning causes vomiting, diarrhea, convulsions, anemia, loss of appetite, abdominal pain, irritability, fatigue, constipation, difficulty sleeping, headaches and coma. It can even be fatal.

Last month, about 40 tubes of potentially toxic toothpaste fraudulently labeled Colgate “Triple Action” were pulled from the shelf of a discount store in Arlington Heights.

“There’s no question we need to do a better job of testing imports before they ever reach store shelves in America,” Congressman Kirk said. “Congress needs to provide additional inspection funds to the FDA and the Consumer Product Safety Commission to effectively protect American families.”

In June, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and Chicago-area toy company RC2 announced a recall of 1.5 million various Thomas & Friends wooden railway toys because they might contain dangerous amounts of lead.

In March, a wave of pet deaths revealed toxic chemicals in Chinese-manufactured pet food. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration investigated and nearly 100 brands of pet food made with the ingredient were ordered recalled.